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ABSTRACT

The director of the Office of Career Education, U. S. Office of Education, identifies and "corrects" what he considers to be conceptual errors about career education found in an article by Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson in the "Harvard Educational Review" (1975, Volume 45, Number 4, pages 451-474). Major errors are categorized under four topics: (1) Differences between career education and vocational education, (2) the concept of work in career education, (3) career education and post-secondary education, and (4) criteria for evaluation of career education. An extensive rebuttal is made to the claims of Grubb and Lazerson, and in concluding, it is stated that while career education welcomes criticism from those who disagree with the concepts espoused, some attention should be paid to basic conceptual statements. A list of references is included.

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SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: A REPLY TO GRUBB AND LAZERSON

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Introduction

Constructive criticism by knowledgeable opponents is crucial and helpful in the evolution of any new concept. The key word here is "constructive." Criticism based on inadequate understanding often leaves proponents of a concept in a position of defending themselves against false accusations. The article by Grubb and Lazerson appearing in the November, 1975, issue of the Harvard Educational Review is filled with false perceptions of career education. It is essential that these false perceptions be corrected. That is the primary purpose of this presentation.

I have, in the last few weeks, responded to comments regarding this article appearing in two of this nation's leading newspapers. In addition, I have written a formal reply identifying and correcting what I regard as the 33 most serious conceptual errors found in this article. That reply is being sent to the Harvard Educational Review in hopes they will consider its publication. Here, I would like to reply by categorizing these 33 errors in a series of only four topics. I can do so, of course, only from the standpoint of the position of the Office of Career Education, U.S. Office of Education. It is my hope that this reply will encourage others to express their own views.

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The major errors of Grubb and Lazerson that I hope to correct here can be categorized under the following headings: (a) differences between career education and vocational education; (b) the concept of "work" in career education; (c) career education and postsecondary education; and (e) criteria for evaluation of career education. Brief comments regarding each appear to be in order.

Remarks prepared for presentation to the National Forum on Career Education, Washington, D.C., February 9, 1976.

Career Education and Vocational Education

Grubb and Lazerson, near the end of their article, state:

"But career education has little to offer in resolving these problems. Despite its assertions to the contrary, it is primarily a renewal and expansion of vocational education, a movement that has previously proven itself ineffective in reducing the gap between rich and poor, in enhancing school learning, in solving social and economic problems, and in improving the status of physical work."(pp. 472-473)

This entire quote illustrates two points: (a) Grubb and Lazerson are failing to distinguish between career education and vocational education; and (b) they are directing major criticisms toward vocational education. Of these two points, I want here to respond only to the first. Vocational educators are perfectly capable of defending themselves against the second.

Almost from the inception of career education, leaders in both career education and vocational education have proclaimed that career education and vocational education, while mutually supportive of each other, are not the same thing. Differences between the two have been stated in many ways. Here, I would like to summarize such differences as they appear in various official OE publications. It is my hope that, by listing all of these differences in one place, we may answer this false accusation once and for all.

1. Vocational education concerns itself primarily with a particular segment of students at the secondary and post-secondary, sub baccalaureate degree level. Career education concerns itself with all students at all levels of education.

2. Vocational education's primary concern is the world of paid employment. Career education is concerned about both paid employment and with unpaid work - including volunteerism, work of the homemaker, and work done as part of productive use of leisure time.

3. Vocational education places a primary substantive emphasis on specific job skills. Career education adds to this a substantive emphasis on adaptability skills required to help students cope with change.

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4. Vocational education is rooted in the philosophy of vocationalism. Career education seeks to fuse the philosophy of vocationalism with the philosophy of humanism.

5. Vocational education is carried out primarily through the teaching/learning process. Career education seeks to fuse the teaching/learning process with the career development process.

6. Vocational education seeks to emphasize education, as preparation for work, by adding new kinds of programs to the curriculum. Career education seeks to emphasize education, as preparation for work, by adding an emphasis on internal changes in the professional commitments of all educators in ways that will encourage them to infuse such an emphasis in all classrooms.

This approach to stating the differences between vocational education and career education has been used for two equally important reasons. First, it should make obvious to all that clear and distinct differences do exist. Second, it should be obvious that career education seeks to add to the emphasis vocational education is already giving to education, as preparation for work. Career education is neither a substitute for nor a competitor to vocational education. Rather, career education regards vocational education as a necessary, but not a sufficient, mechanism for bringing a proper emphasis to the goal of education as preparation for work on the part of all who teach and all who learn at all levels of American education. Most vocational educators seem to agree - as evidenced by their strong support of career education.

The Concept of "Work" in Career Education

Grubb and Lazerson are particularly critical of the concept of "work" as used in career education. Their criticisms are illustrated in the following quotes from their article:

"The assumptions of career education about the nature of work and the demand for labor are largely a myth." (p. 472)

"Career education's view of the moral benefits of work is incongruent with the nature of most jobs or the logic of corporate capitalism." (p. 473)

"Career educators have ignored mounting evidence that the particular jobs available in advanced capitalist economics lack the moral qualities attributed to work generally." (p. 465)

"Hence, the faith that the moral benefits of work can counteract a sense of individual aimlessness or a lack of attachment to social institutions is seriously misplaced. In fact, given the negative aspects of most jobs, the introduction of "real work" in the schools might have just the opposite effect from that intended: feelings of alienation, anomie, and disconnectedness, or physical manifestations such as hypertension, high blood pressure, and poor mental health might begin earlier." (p. 466)

In making these assertions, Grubb and Lazerson are obviously attacking both career education's concept of "work" and the nature of America's current occupational society as it exists under our capitalistic system. As with their attack on vocational education, I must leave to others more expert than I to answer the accusations raised regarding our capitalistic society. However, before doing so, let me acknowledge that it is true that career education does operate under assumptions of great and abiding faith in this system. While we know it is imperfect and in need of change, we much prefer it to any other economic system available in the world today. Having said this, let me proceed to attempt a defense of the concept of "work" as used in career education.

The USOE policy paper, An Introduction to Career Education, defines work as:

"conscious effort, other than that involved in activities whose primary purpose is either coping or relaxation, aimed at producing benefits for oneself or for oneself and others."

The four key words in this definition are:

"conscious" - which means it is something the individual chose to do

"effort" - which means some necessary degree of difficulty is involved

"produce" - which means that some clear outcome is sought

"benefit" - which means the outcome is designed to help, not hurt, people

This definition obviously is intended to cover the world of paid employment as well as unpaid work. This is not to say that career education assumes that all persons will find "work" in the world of paid employment. We are well aware of the fact that, for many, "labor," not "work," is what is experienced most days. The fact that this is so has nothing to do with the importance of work in meeting the human need of all human beings to do - to achieve - to accomplish - to produce. That is why career education places a primary emphasis on a "success" approach to the teaching/learning relationship - why we emphasize helping individuals recognize and realize what they have done, not what they have failed to do. It is also related to our insistence that unpaid work, as well as paid employment, must be included in the definition of "work." If the human need to work cannot be found in the world of paid employment, then ways must be found to meet that need through productive use of leisure time.

Our emphasis on "work" is intended to reflect our concern for helping all individuals find purpose and purposiveness - meaning and meaningfulness - in their lives through recognizing that they have been able to do. We believe that any individual is best known to himself/herself and to others through what he/she has been able to accomplish. We are convinced that this basic sense of purposiveness and of meaningfulness is, today, missing in the lives of many Americans - both youth and adults. We further believe that, if the concept of "work" can be made apparent and real to children at an early age through a career education approach in the classroom, it will have "carry over" effect into the world of paid employment.

In short, we in career education have placed our primary trust in the individual - not in either the economic system nor in the political society. If we are successful in our efforts to help individuals experience and value work while in the educational system, we are convinced that their chances of finding and valuing work through the jobs they hold in the world of paid employment will increase. To say this is simply to recognize that what is "work" to one person may very well be "labor" to another and "play" to still another. The reality of "work" lies in perceptions of the individual, not in the nature of a particular job or occupation. To the extent people can perceive their jobs in the world of paid employment as "work" - i.e., as purposeful, meaningful, productive effort, rather than as "labor" - i.e., as involuntary, meaningless effort that has no individual purpose or sense of accomplishment - we have assumed that productivity in the world of paid employment will increase. This is not an unreasonable assumption.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that, by organizing the career education effort around the process of career development, we are using a base that has many years of productive research behind it. It is an orderly and a systematic process. By emphasizing both the multiplicity of work values existing in our current society and by simultaneously emphasizing the steps in career decision making, we are operating in ways that maximize self understanding and expanded freedom of choice for all individuals. Far from being an attempt to "brainwash" individuals, career education is a developmental approach to increasing the readiness and the ability of each individual to exercise maximum control over her/his own destiny. Our assumptions regarding the nature of "work" are not a "myth," as Grubb and Lazerson have charged.

Career Education and Postsecondary Education

At several points in their article, Grubb and Lazerson make statements regarding

what they perceive to be efforts, on the part of career education, to discourage college attendance. Typical of their comments are the following:

"Career educators assume that when students are aware of alternatives to college and can establish 'realistic' goals through career awareness programs, unnecessary college attendance will decrease." (p. 457)

"Career educators assume that bringing students into contact with the world of work and giving them realistic aspirations will blunt students' drives to college." (p. 471)

"Career education attempts to attenuate this dysfunction by bringing aspirations in line with the availability of high-skill jobs, by replacing high aspirations with lower ones, and by preparing students in ways that make continuation to higher education more difficult." (p. 473)

The most direct and simple way of answering these accusations is to label them for what they are - FALSE. However, since others as well as Grubb and Lazerson have voiced these kinds of fears, it seems desirable to summarize here an OE position on this matter. Such a summary includes the following points:

1. It is true that career education seeks to emphasize multiple educational opportunities available for use by students in preparing themselves for work. We are, to be sure, trying to eradicate the false notion that the best and surest route to occupational success is represented by the college degree.

2. Our concern is with helping students make reasoned educational and occupational decisions. We are neither attempting to encourage attendance at postsecondary vocational-technical type institutions nor discouraging attendance in liberal arts colleges. If the career education effort is successful, each type of postsecondary education will get the students it deserves. Students will be aware of the institution's purposes and, by contrasting such purposes with those of the individual student, will be able to decide which kind of educational institution best meets their needs.

3. In the case of four-year colleges and universities, career education seeks to emphasize the proper place education, as preparation for work, holds among

the multiple goals of the institution. It may well be that one of the direct results of career education will be to encourage colleges and universities to clarify and give proper emphasis to their particular goals that have nothing at all to do with education as preparation for work.

4. Career education asks no college or university to hold, as one of its basic goals, that of education as preparation for work. Rather, we simply ask those institutions who do not value this goal to make this clear to the students who attend and to their parents.

5. For those colleges and universities who do hold education as preparation for work as one of their basic goals, we ask that a proper balance be maintained between the institution's efforts to provide students with adaptability skills through the liberal arts and with job specific skills through their preprofessional and professional programs. As with our efforts at the elementary and secondary levels, we hope, within such colleges and universities, to make education as preparation for work a major goal of all who teach and all who learn.

6. Those colleges and universities who hold education as preparation for work as one of their basic goals will find many implications for change inherent in the career education concept. We feel strongly that career education belongs on the university campus fully as much as it belongs in the elementary and secondary schools.

It is hoped that these six points will help clarify the position of the United States Office of Education in this matter as stated in the OE policy paper, An Introduction To Career Education.

Criteria for Evaluation of Career Education

At several points in their article, Grubb and Lazerson pose what they claim to be criteria for evaluating career education advanced by career education advocates.

They then devote space to describing why, in their opinion, career education cannot meet these criteria. As an attempt to provide clarification on this point, I would like here to present two lists of evaluative criteria specifically mentioned in this article. The first list contains evaluative criteria ascribed to career education that, in fact, are false. The second list contains evaluative criteria Grubb and Lazerson say career education cannot meet which, in fact, we believe we can.

False evaluative criteria ascribed to career education by Grubb and Lazerson

1. Possession of a set of marketable job skills on the part of every high school graduate. (p. 454)
2. Decrease in unemployment. (p. 457)
3. Preparation of students for entry level, rather than professional, jobs (p. 469-470)
4. Blunting students' drive toward college attendance. (p. 471)
5. Reduction in student expectations and limiting of student aspirations. (p. 473)

Before proceeding to the second list, let me try to correct the false perceptions raised by Grubb and Lazerson in posting this list of erroneous evaluative criteria. A sentence or two with respect to each should be sufficient for doing so.

1. The OE policy paper, An Introduction to Career Education, proposes that every student, by the time she/he leaves the formal education system, be equipped with a set of marketable job skills. It does NOT say by the time they leave high school.

2. Reduction in unemployment is not one of the learner outcomes listed in the OE policy paper on career education. While we expect the career education effort to make some positive contribution here, the total problem is

too complex and influenced by too many factors to make it a reasonable primary criterion for use in evaluating career education.

3. The 15 OE clusters cover the full range of occupations, from the lowest level entry jobs through those requiring the highest levels of graduate preparation. The emphasis is certainly not aimed at entry level, as opposed to professional, preparation. Even more basic, career education is not a kind of preparation program (which simply makes this criterion still more inappropriate).

4. The previous section should have made it clear that career education in no way seeks to discourage students from attending college.

5. Whether the career education results in raising or lowering student expectations and aspirations will be a function of where the student is at the time the career education effort is applied. The goal is not aimed at "raising" or "lowering", but, rather, aimed at increasing student self-understanding and student understanding of educational/occupational alternatives.

Valid evaluative criteria for career education which Grubb & Lazerson claim cannot be met

1. Reduction in likelihood of preparing students for dead-end jobs (p. 456)
2. Readyng students for a progression of jobs (p. 470)
3. Preparing students for careers rather than dead-end jobs (p. 469)
4. Resolving social problems (p. 473)
5. Developing avenues of upward mobility (p. 473)
6. Making school and work more satisfying experiences (p. 473)

The first three of these six criteria relate to career education's efforts to equip all students with adaptability skills including: (a) basic academic skills; (b) good work habits; (c) a personally meaningful set of work values; (d) career decision-making skills; and (e) job seeking, job getting, and job

holding skills. If students are equipped with such skills, they should be prepared to change with changes in the occupational society. Grubb and Lazerson's claim that many jobs are not arranged in "career ladders" is irrelevant. It is the individual's career, not the job's career, with which we are concerned.

While, of course, career education is limited in its potential for solving current social problems, there are three such problems for which we do claim potential for making some positive contribution. These are: (a) the problem of productivity; (b) the problem of reduction of sex stereotyping as a deterrent to freedom of occupational choice; and (c) the problem of reduction of race bias in limiting full freedom of educational and occupational opportunities. Given proper resources, I am not afraid of having career education evaluated on these measures.

Certainly, career education's emphasis on education/work relationships and on lifelong learning both argue for its potential in developing avenues of upward mobility. As with many of the other criteria in this list, career education makes no pretense of being, by itself, a sufficient vehicle. It does claim the potential for some positive impact.

Finally, it is most difficult to understand how Grubb and Lazerson could claim that career education holds little or no potential for making school and work more satisfying experiences. If there is any single contribution that career education clearly claims, it is in this domain. Career education's approach in the classroom is built around conscious attempts to reduce worker alienation, among both students and teachers, in the classroom. It should make school more satisfying to both. If students understand themselves in terms of their own work values, the potential is clearly present for making the work they do a more meaningful and satisfying experience for them.

While this is not the proper place for yet another listing, I would urge all concerned with the question of criteria appropriate for use in evaluating career education to study carefully the nine learner outcomes for career education found in the OE policy paper, An Introduction to Career Education. It makes an interesting contrast to the lists found in Grubb and Lazerson's article.

Concluding Remarks

Career education is, to be sure, still an evolving concept. Yet, the high degree of consensus found among career education practitioners, state coordinators of career education, and career education conceptualizers with respect to the OE policy paper, An Introduction to Career Education, makes it apparent that, on many basic points, consensus has already been attained. It is, I think, most unfortunate that this consensus paper was completely ignored by Grubb and Lazerson as they prepared their criticisms of career education. Career education welcomes criticism from those who disagree with the concepts we espouse. We feel, however, that it is not unreasonable to expect that those who disagree with us would pay some attention to our basic conceptual statements. I hope our future critics will do so.

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